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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 003046

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SUBJECT: WHEN HU JINTAO COMES FOR DINNER: LOCAL PARTY  
SECRETARY DESCRIBES HU'S 2007 VISIT TO RURAL VILLAGE

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor  
Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: In an October 28 meeting with PolOffs, Shi Jing (protect), a former municipal party secretary in Gansu Province, described a 2007 Chinese New Year visit by CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao to his district and offered insights into how Hu's domestic trips are organized. Much of what Shi described -- taking the advance team on site visits, carefully stage-managing events, and making sure everything looked good on television -- was predictable. The CCP General Office, however, went to great lengths to maintain secrecy and did not reveal the identity of the VIP visitor to local officials until the moment of Hu's arrival. In arranging Hu's visit with a local peasant family, General Office officials issued strict orders forbidding local cadres from attempting to "improve" the modest home with new electronics and furnishings, and Shi instructed the family patriarch not to shave prior to the big day. End summary.

"Someone Wants to Visit, But We Can't Say Hu"

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2. (C) PolOffs met October 28 with Shi Jing (protect), the Secretary General of the Gansu Provincial Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the former Party Secretary of Dingxi, a poverty-stricken municipality 60 miles southeast of the provincial capital Lanzhou. Shi spoke at length about his experience hosting the 2007 Chinese New Year visit to Dingxi by CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao. In early February 2007, ten days prior to Hu's arrival, Shi received notice that a high-level CCP leader would visit Dingxi during the holiday. Soon afterward, CCP General Office Deputy Director Ling Jihua arrived in Dingxi to conduct the advance work. Shi said he quickly realized the visitor was Hu Jintao based on Ling's high rank and the fact that only the Xinhua News Agency and China Central Television (CCTV) would be covering the visit. In his experience, Shi explained, the higher level the visitor, the fewer media outlets that were allowed to cover the visit. Hu Jintao had visited Dingxi in 1999, and Shi suspected the General Secretary wanted to conduct a follow-up inspection. Although Shi said he and other local officials had been nearly certain the "high-level visitor" would be Hu, the advance team would not reveal the visitor's identity and Shi's suspicion was only confirmed when Hu actually arrived in Dingxi February 17.

The Unshaven Masses

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13. (C) Around February 14, three days prior to the visit, General Office Deputy Director Ling asked to go to Daping village to find a farm home where the unnamed VIP could eat a New Year meal. The choice of Daping offered a further clue that the visitor would be Hu since the village had been a stop on Hu's 1999 trip. Ling chose the home of 70-year-old Li Cai. (Note: According to press reporting of Hu's visit, Li Cai was a long-time Party member, indicating the choice perhaps was not as random as Shi claimed.) The house appealed to the General Office advance team not only because it looked rustic, Shi said, but Li himself sported a long beard that made him the epitome of a weathered Gansu farmer. The selection made, Ling ordered that nothing be added or removed from the home for the three days that remained until the visit. Shi explained that the General Office was afraid local officials would attempt to "improve" the house by installing new electronics, appliances, or furniture, which Shi said was a common problem when high-level leaders visited the countryside. Another potential pitfall of such VIP visits, Shi said, was the natural inclination of peasants to want to look their best when greeting a senior official. Shi said it was common for Chinese farmers who looked appropriately rough-hewn during the advance to show up on game day "cleanly shaven wearing new leather jackets." For this reason, Shi said, he gave strict orders to village leaders to make sure Li Cai did not shave, and Li kept his

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beard as instructed.

Don't Burn the General Secretary  
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14. (C) With the home chosen for the New Year meal, Shi was faced with an array of difficult issues related to the food choices. Word came from the General Office that "the visitor" wanted to make meat dumplings with the family, which Shi arranged even though it was not the local custom. Another part of the meal, a genuine local tradition of frying twisted dough sticks in a wok of boiling oil, presented the serious risk of hot oil splashing on Hu Jintao. The solution, Shi said, was to heat the oil to 70 percent of the normal temperature and give Hu an extra long set of chopsticks. When it came time to eat, Hu's own undercooked portion was set aside in favor of properly fried dough sticks that had been prepared earlier.

The Potato  
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15. (C) Shi viewed Hu's visit as a chance to promote Dingxi potatoes, the area's main product. Despite the General Office's demand not to tamper with the house, Shi had a stove and chimney installed for cooking potatoes. During the meal, Hu dutifully took a potato and offered part of it to Li Cai's kindergarten-aged granddaughter. In the only unscripted moment of the visit, Shi said, the child refused the potato, saying that she was sick of eating them. According to Shi, Hu Jintao laughed off the incident. The family eventually cajoled the girl into accepting, and a shot of the Hu and the girl sharing the potato was broadcast on the CCTV evening news. Shi said he believed that having Hu Jintao eat the potato in front of the CCTV cameras was potentially worth millions in promoting Dingxi potatoes. (Note: These scenes can be viewed on the CCTV website at <http://vsearch.cctv.com/plgs play->

The Woeful Life of a Local Party Secretary

16. (C) Shi shared insights into his challenges in managing the poor municipality, characterizing his responsibilities as "very stressful." Shi saiQe was constantly worried about something going wrong ("chu shi") especially a large traffic accident, natural disaster, or an attempt by local residents to petition grievances to higher levels. "When the phone rang at night, it was never good news," Shi said. To protect his time, Shi established a strict system to manage meeting requests and, as a rule, would not accept any invitation to meals or social events from people in Dingxi. Shi, however, said he bent over backwards to be a good host to visitors from "vertical organizations" (chuizhi danwei, i.e., bureaucracies or state companies answering directly to the central level), including officials from electric power companies, state banks, and taxation offices. Good relations with these individuals, Shi said, was critical for solving Dingxi's problems, including improving uneven electrical coverage and securing infrastructure loans.

On Political Reform

17. (C) Shi was mildly critical of China's political system and expressed hope for greater political reform, though not for an end to Communist Party rule. He contrasted the highly scripted nature of events involving Chinese leaders to U.S. Presidential public appearances, where audience members frequently asked tough questions. Shi spoke favorably of his new position in the Gansu CPPCC (an advisory body that includes a large portion of non-Communist figures that provides policy advice to the National Peoples Congress), where he was transferred from Dingxi in 2008. CPPCC members, Shi remarked, were more willing to "speak their minds" than National People's Congress deputies. Political reform in China, Shi predicted, would start from the CPPCC system.

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HUNTSMAN